

Message Text

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P R 090240Z APR 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 085459

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS:OEXC UR, US

SUBJECT:CANCELLATION OF DON COSSACK PERFORMANCES IN
NEW YORK CITY

1. CAMI DECIDED APRIL 7 TO CANCEL APRIL 12-15 PERFORMANCES
AT CARNEGIE HALL OF DON COSSACK OF ROSTOV TROUPE. THESE
WERE FINAL PERFORMANCES OF US TOUR BY GROUP WHICH HAS GONE
OFF WITHOUT INCIDENT.

2. CAMI WAS IN TOUCH WITH DEPT., WITH SOVIET EMBASSY, AND
WITH NYC POLICE BEFORE MAKING DECISION. IN DISCUSSIONS WITH
DEPT, CAMI OFFICIALS EXPRESSED SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF BODILY HARM TO PERFORMERS DURING THEIR
APPEARANCES. CAMI FELT THAT RECENT SHOOTINGS AT SMUN AND
BOMB THREATS AGAINST SOVIET INSTALLATIONS AND EMOTIONS THAT
MIGHT BE EVOKED IN CERTAIN CIRCLES BY WORD COSSACK CREATED
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SITUATION IN WHICH CAMI COULD NOT ENSURE COMPLETE SAFETY

OF TROUPE. (THEY TOLD US THAT IF IT HAD BEEN ANY OTHER SOVIET GROUP, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN WILLING TO GO AHEAD, BUT WITH SOME RESERVATIONS.) UNLESS EITHER SOVIET EMBASSY OR DEPT WERE WILLING TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY, CAMI FELT IT WOULD HAVE TO CANCEL NYC PERFORMANCES. WE UNDERSTAND SOVIET EMBASSY TOLD CAMI THAT WHILE EMBASSY WOULD PREFER TO SEE PERFORMANCES TAKE PLACE, IT COULD NOT ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR GROUP AND THAT FINAL DECISION RESTED WITH CAMI.

3. IN DEPT'S DISCUSSIONS WITH CAMI, WE TOLD THEM WE THOUGHT CANCELLATION WOULD APPEAR TO PLAY INTO HANDS OF EXTREMIST GROUPS AND WE URGED CAMI TO GO AHEAD WITH ORIGINAL SCHEDULE. WE HAD NO EVIDENCE NOR DID NYC POLICE THAT ANY SERIOUS DEMONSTRATIONS WERE BEING PLANNED, ALTHOUGH WE ACKNOWLEDGED OUR INTELLIGENCE MIGHT NOT BE COMPLETE. WHILE WE COULD NOT PROVIDE ABSOLUTE ASSURANCES OF SAFETY THAT CAMI WANTED, WE WERE PREPARED TO LOOK INTO TAKING ADDITIONAL STEPS WE COULD TO BEEF UP SECURITY MEASURES AT CARNEGIE HALL IN CONJUNCTION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES. WE HAD, AS PRELIMINARY STEPS, DESIGNATED GROUP AS OFFICIAL GUESTS OF US AND ASST SECRETARY HARTMAN HAD WRITTEN MAYOR BEAME EXPLAINING IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMING ARTS EXCHANGES AND ASKING CITY'S ASSISTANCE IN PROVIDING ADEQUATE SECURITY. WE WERE ALSO PREPARING, AT REQUEST OF CAMI WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS, DRAFT LETTER FROM DEPT TO CAMI, EXPLAINING IMPORTANCE OF GOING AHEAD WITH PERFORMANCES AND MEASURES DEPT COULD TAKE IN SECURITY AREA. CAMI NEVERTHELESS DECIDED TO CANCEL.

4. FOLLOWING CAMI'S DECISION (WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN MADE PUBLIC), SOVIET EMBASSY COUNSELOR SAKOVICH CALLED ON EUR/SOV APRIL 7 TO EXPRESS 'OFFICIAL POSITION' ON CAMI'S ACTION. ACCORDING TO SAKOVICH, CANCELLATION WOULD LOOK LIKE CAPITULATION TO JDL; IT WAS A VIOLATION OF THE OFFICIAL EXCHANGES AGREEMENT; MOSCOW WOULD REGARD ACTION EVEN MORE SERIOUSLY THAN THE EMBASSY AND CONSTRUE IT AS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED SINCE NO ASSURANCES HAD BEEN GIVEN BY "OFFICIAL CIRCLES" TO CAMI ABOUT SAFETY OF COMPANY. EMBASSY WAS CONCERNED THAT CANCELLATION WOULD LEAD TO FURTHER DETERIORATION OF ATMOSPHERE, AND WAS ASKING DEPT

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TO TAKE STEPS TO REINSTITUTE THE PERFORMANCES.

5. EUR/SOV DEP DIRECTOR (EXCHANGES) TOLD SAKOVICH THAT WHILE HE PERSONALLY COULD AGREE THAT DECISION MIGHT LOOK LIKE CAPITULATION, HE COULD NOT AGREE THAT DECISION WAS VIOLATION OF EXCHANGES AGREEMENT. AGREEMENT PROVIDED THAT BOTH PARTIES WOULD FACILITATE EXCHANGE OF PAGES, AND WE WERE PREPARED TO FACILITATE PAGE EXCHANGES TO THE EXTENT

POSSIBLE BECAUSE THEY ARE IMPORTANT PART OF AGREEMENT. COMPANY HAD COMPLETED OVER SIXTY PERFORMANCES AND WHAT WAS AT ISSUE WERE FOUR MORE; THIS COULD HARDLY BE CONSIDERED VIOLATION OF CULTURAL AGREEMENT. CONTRACTS FOR SOVIET PAGES IN US WERE SIGNED BETWEEN PRIVATE US IMPRESARIOS AND GOSKONTSERT AND NOT BY USG. WHAT WOULD SEEM TO BE AT ISSUE WAS NOT VIOLATION OF AGREEMENT BUT POSSIBLE BREACH OF CONTRACT. THIS WAS MATTER BETWEEN CAMI AND GOSKONTSERT. DEP. DIRECTOR TOLD SAKOVICH DEPT WAS IN TOUCH WITH CAMI ABOUT QUESTION OF SECURITY FOR COMPANY AND NOTED STEPS

(DESIGNATION AS OFFICIAL GUESTS AND HARTMAN LETTER) WE HAD TAKEN. CAMI'S DECISION, HOWEVER, WAS ITS OWN, BASED ON JUDGMENT OF ITS OFFICIALS, AND DEPT COULD NOT FORCE CAMI TO REVERSE ITSELF. IT WOULD AT SAME TIME BE INCORRECT TO ATTRIBUTE ANY POLITICAL MOTIVATION FOR CAMI'S DECISION. WE SEE NO REASON WHY CANCELLATION OF FOUR PERFORMANCES SHOULD HAVE ANY REPERCUSSIONS ON NEGOTIATIONS FOR UPCOMING PAGES.

6. FYI. IN DISCUSSION WITH CAMI APRIL 8, WE WERE TOLD THAT TICKET SALES FOR DON COSSACK PERFORMANCES WERE GOING VERY SLOWLY-LESS THAN ONE-QUARTER OF SEATS SOLD FOR FIRST NIGHT AND NOT MUCH BETTER FOR OTHER NIGHTS. IT WOULD BE LESS EXPENSIVE TO CAMI TO CANCEL PERFORMANCES THAN TO GO AHEAD. THIS PROBABLY AN ADDITIONAL REASON FOR CAMI'S DECISION. END FYI. CAMI PLANS TO STATE, IF ASKED, THAT CANCELLATION DUE TO TECHNICAL REASONS. WE ARE PREPARING CONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE. SISCO

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